



Aalto University
School of Business

Mikkeli Campus

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF LINGUA FRANCA ON STUDENT GROUP COHESION AND MOTIVATION

A study conducted in a multicultural tertiary education setting

Liisa Holmstén

International Business
Bachelor's Thesis
Supervisor: Mirjaliisa Charles
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Objectives

The main objectives of this study were to contribute to the understanding of communication related issues in an international student environment. The understanding gained from this study could help enhance student motivation, performance, and well-being at the target organization.

Summary

In-depth focus group discussions and interviews were held to explore the students' perceptions on the use of a mutual language, group cohesion, and their study motivation. The student body was divided into three focus groups, to explore the differences between Vietnamese students, who form a significant portion of the international students, and other international students. A Finnish focus group was incorporated firstly, to provide a Finnish perspective to the matter and secondly, to explore the impact that belonging to the majority on campus may have.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that the international students of the target organization experience negative feelings caused by the lacking use of the mutual language, English, in social settings. All participants, international and Finnish students alike, report excessive use of Finnish compared to English in social settings. These insights can be considered valuable to enhance student well-being, performance, and motivation, as well as the over-all success of the

target organization.

Key words: English as lingua franca (ELF), group cohesion, multicultural organization, multilingual organization, study motivation, tertiary education

Language: English

Grade:

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research Problem	2
1.3. Research Questions	3
1.4 Research Objective	4
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Language Issues in Multicultural Organizations	4
2.2.1 English as Lingua Franca	5
2.3 Language and Group Cohesion in Multicultural Organizations	10
2.4 Work Motivation in Multicultural Organizations	13
2.5 Conclusion	14
3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	15
4. DATA AND METHODOLOGY	16
4.1. Data Collection Method: A Combination of Focus Group Discussions and Interviews 16	
4.2 The Set-up of the Focus Group Discussions and Interviews	18
4.3 Sample	18
4.4 Interpretation of the Data	21
4.5 Confidentiality	21
5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	22
5.1 Background Information on Participants	22
5.1.1 Relationship with One's Native Language	22
5.1.2 Relationship with the English Language	23
5.2 Language Matters: English Language Usage on Campus	24
5.2.1 Encountering Situations where English Not Used	24
5.2.2 Feelings that Arise when English Is Not Used	26
5.2.3 Proposed Reasons Behind Neglecting the Use of English	33
5.3 Language Matters and Group Cohesion	35
5.2.1 Who do you spend time with?	35
5.2.2 Social Events on Campus	40
5.3 Study Motivation	43
5.4 Effect of 'Support Group'	44
5.5 Finnish Students' Perspective	45

5.5.1	Perceptions on the Use of English on Campus	45
6.	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	49
6.1	Summary of Main Findings	49
6.1.1	Main Findings Pertaining to Language Issues	49
6.1.2	Main Findings Pertaining to Group Cohesion	51
6.1.3	Main Findings Pertaining to Study Motivation	51
6.2	Answers to Research Questions	52
6.3	Conclusions and Discussion	53
6.4	Implications for International Business	56
6.5	Limitations	57
6.5.1	Generalizability	58
6.6	Suggestions for Further Research	59

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Issues regarding communication in multicultural organizations have gained more and more importance in the globalizing world. As companies worldwide are becoming multinational organizations with a diverse workforce, they are simultaneously becoming multilingual organizations.

The presence of several different languages imposes many challenges to organizations. Among other issues, it creates an increased risk of miscommunication, risk of division between language, and the need for establishing a shared language which may follow with challenges caused by different levels of proficiency in that shared language or information and knowledge 'lost in translation' due to cultural differences, to mention a few.

However, these challenges should not be seen as anything negative to be avoided, as an obstacle one must barge over. Rather, they can be seen as an intriguing challenge that an organization must accommodate its operations to, find new ways of approaching matters, and, finally, flourish because of the variety of knowledge and differing perspectives to matters the spectrum of language backgrounds offers.

Language matters in the world of international business have been widely studied by scholars worldwide. Researchers largely agree that dealing with language matters is greatly important for the success of a company, as leaving issues undealt or dealing with them superficially may lead to decreased employee satisfaction, disrupt the flow of information, and in many other ways hinder the company from accessing all of its potential.

It is relatively safe to say that some of the principals found in business context may be applied to an international educational setting as well. Multinational business and a multinational tertiary education organization share many fundamental elements. First and foremost, both are multinational and multilingual communities where

individuals cooperate for a shared aim. Thereby, there is a need for a mutual language to be used in communication. Furthermore, for educational and business settings alike, it can be considered important to create a feeling of working together and belonging, leading to peer support, increased motivation, and, ultimately, feelings of group cohesion. These feelings easily enhance the success of the organization as well as the success and well-being of its individual members. For all of the above, a mutual language, as mentioned, is required. In addition, this mutual language is needed for accomplishing the basic functions in both organizations: business operations in companies and the teaching and learning process in the educational organization.

However, educational and business settings naturally differ from each other in many ways as well. The most relevant difference for this study would be the significance of social processes, meaning that in an educational organization, socializing with other students is crucial as it creates a feeling of belonging, acceptance, and thereby group cohesion or even study motivation. This is particularly true in a small educational unit in a small town like Mikkeli, as the one explored in this study. In a business setting, on the contrary, the afore mentioned needs can most of the time be fulfilled outside of the workplace.

Consequently, this study on the perceived impact of a mutual language is conducted at Aalto University School of Business, Mikkeli Campus (International Business Program). The educational unit in question offers an excellent environment where language issues together with group cohesion and motivation can be examined.

1.2 Research Problem

In a multinational and multilingual educational context, the use – or non-use – of a mutual language in social settings may impact perceptions of group cohesion and students' study motivation. This study aims to explore how the language use affects group coherence and motivation in the target organization.

Aalto University School of Business, Mikkeli Campus, where the research will be conducted, is a small unit of 235 attending students. 28 per cent of these students are international students, of which nearly 50 per cent are Vietnamese. The unit could be characterized as a very tightknit community, where more or less everyone knows each other.

As a significant number of students comes from abroad and do not speak Finnish – the dominant language among the students – knowledge on their study motivation and perceptions on group cohesion is crucial for, firstly, the students' wellbeing, but ultimately, also for the success of the unit. Furthermore, Aalto University is implementing an internationalization strategy, for which the understanding of issues pertaining to the integration of international students is crucial.

Moreover, students of International Business in a multinational and multilingual environment are, in a sense, practicing for a career in international business. As language matters affect any multinational and multilingual organization alike and are a key issue in IB, the experiences gained from the multilingual environment of the Mikkeli unit may set a precedent for their careers making it important to enhance this experience in the best way possible.

1.3. Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How does successful language use in social settings affect student study motivation and perceptions of being part of a cohesive group? In this context, international students are defined as non-Finnish speaking students.
2. Do international students relate more to other international students than to the university community as a whole? If so, what are the main reasons?
3. Are perceptions of group cohesion affected by a 'support group' sharing the same mother tongue?

1.4 Research Objective

The research objective of this study is to contribute to the understanding of communication related issues in an international student environment, in order to enhance student motivation, performance, and well-being.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the rapidly internationalizing world, questions of language have constantly become more prevalent. These issues have been discussed fairly extensively in International Business (IB) literature. In this literature review, studies in lingua franca and group cohesion in multinational organizations together with theories on work motivation will be discussed both as separate entities and as three highly interrelated dimensions of the day-to-day operations of multicultural organizations. Main focus is on language matters, while issues on group cohesion and work motivation are assessed as resulting from language and communication.

2.2 Language Issues in Multicultural Organizations

Vaara et al. (2005) see language questions in a multicultural corporation as something far more than simply communication challenges. Consequently, they argue that corporate language policies should not be treated as merely practical means to solve issues in communication. This view is widely supported by many scholars who all agree that when a company internationalizes its operations, the choices made regarding the new language strategy are crucial (i.e. Charles, 2006, Vaara et al., 2005; Welch & Welch, 2018; Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015; Janssens & Steyaert, 2014).

Language matters in multicultural organizations are complex combinations of a

variety of factors. This study focuses only on the verbal language component of communication excluding, for example, body language.

2.2.1 English as Lingua Franca

Lingua franca refers to the mutual language among a group of multilingual people. Lingua francas have existed for centuries and have traditionally been linked to a specific geographic area with a need for a mutual language. An example of this is the role of Latin in mediaeval Europe, now replaced by English.

There has been much debate and ambiguity in what should be the exact definition of 'English as lingua franca' (ELF). However, most researchers seem to agree on the definition of ELF at least to the degree that 'ELF is the resource used among speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds in their interpersonal communication, native speakers of English thus included' (Kankaanranta et al., 2017: 337).

Lingua franca of the modern world differs vastly from the lingua francas of history. The lingua franca of the modern world seems to be nearly undeniably English and what most distinguishes it from the lingua francas of the past, is that it is not geographically bound. English is used in communication between different nationalities, language groups, and contexts world-wide. This is what we call English Lingua Franca, ELF.

A version of ELF is BELF: Business English Lingua Franca. As the multicultural and multilingual global business field is buzzing in business operators whose native language is not English, a reconceptualization of ELF is used to accurately incorporate this factor. BELF explicitly considers the fact that majority of ELF users are not native speakers and include the context where the language is used, business, and disclaiming the language from the use of solely native speakers (Charles, 2007; For more detailed information,

see e.g. Louhiala-Salminen & Charles, 2006; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005).

Together, ELF and BELF form a language that is used in business settings globally and, ideally, accepts different levels of language proficiency and cultural backgrounds as BELF itself forms a language culture of its own (Charles, 2007).

All multilingual organizations need a language strategy to cope with the spectrum of languages in the organization. Studies in lingua franca revolve largely around the notion of English often being the optimal lingua franca. This notion is supported by several distinguished scholars, who believe that when English is a second language for all, the use of it as a mutual language, instead of a native language of one of the parties, mends several possible unwanted side effects of language strategy (Vaara et al., 2005).

Some scholars find language proficiency and, consequently, language trainings key to successful use of BELF. However, Kankaanranta et al. (2018) suggest a somewhat different perspective to tackling differences in BELF proficiency. They emphasize the need to learn communication skills and not merely technical proficiency. It cannot be argued that language proficiency on the whole is not important, as being able to express oneself and one's ideas is immensely important for the success of a company, not to mention individual well-being. However, it is fair to argue that encouraging a 'get the job done' attitude (Kankaanranta et al., 2018) is more fruitful. Furthermore, if language trainings would be held, they should focus on understanding the big scheme of international communication, not 'systematic knowledge of any one language' (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002: 9). Tolerance towards different kinds and levels of English might very well be intertwined with this – something that is crucial for operating in the world of international business.

More specifically, communicational skills in the mutual language are important for enhancing the creation of social relationships beyond language boundaries, which, in turn, can be seen as important for issues such as knowledge transfer and other matters that affect the success of the

organization (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999; Luring & Selmer, 2010). Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999) discuss the matter as follows:

“Language barriers also had negative consequences beyond the immediate communication situation. Limited language skills appeared to constrain the possibilities for subsidiary staff to engage in building horizontal relationships with other units and headquarters.” (p. 427)

Moreover, Vaara et al.’s research revealed the creation of new social networks as a result of differences in language skills. Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999) had noticed the same trend. They explain how ‘language imposes specific structures on communication flow and personal networks’ (p. 421). In practice, this means that those with higher language skills are able to build broad networks within the different branches of a multinational as they are able to communicate more efficiently with a larger number of people in the organization. In addition, they become language mediators for those with restricted language skills. Those with restricted language skills, on the contrary, tend to rely on close relationships only with these language mediators.

Perhaps one of the most prevalent issues regarding differences in lingua franca skills is the creation of power imbalance (e.g. Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Vaara et al., 2005; Kankaanranta et al., 2018).

Vaara et al. (2005) discover a general, yet highly accurate, way of summing up the power imbalances arising from language policies: the language skills of a member of a multicultural organization can prove to be empowering or disempowering for them. The research applies the theory on circuits of power (Clegg, 1989) to study the power implications of corporate language policies in a merger.

Vaara et al. (2005) realized, somewhat alarmingly, that the lack of proficiency in the organization’s lingua franca was associated with one’s professional competences. Those, who were not able to express themselves as fluently in the newly chosen corporate language were stigmatized as also lacking in professional competences and, consequently, being inferior to those who

spoke the language fluently.

Another aspect pertaining to power imbalance is its impact on career mobility. Laatikka et al. (2016) found that those with lower lingua franca skills are less likely to consider both horizontal and vertical as well as internal and external career mobility than those with higher language skills. The finding was based on whether they felt prepared or not to make a career move. It was clear that those with higher corporate language skills felt more prepared than those with lower corporate language skills. Supported by Vaara et al.'s (2005) discovery on associating language skills with one's professional competences, it could be reasonable to assume that the clear division of feelings of preparedness was largely caused by how their language skills affected their perception of their professional abilities.

Adding on this, Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014) found that boundary spanning – navigating between one's in-group and out-groups – is affected by language skills. It seems as if those with higher language skills are even seen as more pleasant people by the rest of the members of the organization. It would be natural to assume so, as the ability to communicate clearly, being able to express oneself, make jokes, understand nuances in speech and many other features that often come with higher language proficiency, make an individual more appealing to others.

The issues mentioned above together with, for instance, feelings of inferiority versus superiority depending on one's language skills, were even claimed to 'ultimately lead to the reification of post-colonial and neo-colonial structures of domination in multinational corporations' (Vaara et al., 2005: 598).

Charles (2007) discusses the issues arising from English use between native and nonnative English speakers. In the context of many multinational organizations, English is rarely a native language for any of its members. Yet, Charles's findings could easily be applied to communication between those with low language skills and those with higher native speaker like language skills.

Firstly, native speakers often perceive communicating with nonnative speakers as a burden, or 'hard work', as Charles puts it, as they have to deal with issues like differences in pronunciation (Jenkins, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004). However, as Charles brilliantly points out, the use of a nonnative language is just as 'hard work' – if not harder – for the counterpart. A wide range of research has made similar conclusions to Charles (2007), including the study conducted a few years earlier by Vaara et al. (2005), which is discussed in great detail in this thesis.

Despite the concerns those with higher English proficiency may have when communicating with those with lower language proficiency, Jenkins (1998, 2000, 2002, 2004) and Seidlhofer (2004), to mention a few, have found that the slight differences in pronunciation or slight grammatical errors often do not cause misunderstandings in lingua franca communication. Therefore, it could be argued that the experiences of some native speakers, or native like speakers, may arise from an 'us' and 'them' perception of the world (Charles, 2007). Rooting from the famous concept of cultural ethnocentricity by Bennett (1986) and what Charles (2007) calls 'linguistic ethnocentricity' might very well be the subconscious mindset behind these feelings.

The principals of linguistic ethnocentricity could possibly be applied to communication between nonnative speakers as well. The same feelings of either carrying – or on the other hand, perhaps even being – a 'burden', may arise depending on differences in language proficiency.

Furthermore, Piekkari et al. (2014) discuss the possible hidden cost a non-native language use may cause, if its users are not pleased with their skills in that language. This 'hidden cost' includes, among others, the difficulty to articulate disagreement and impoverished and silenced discussion that mainly arise from 'thinking' and 'talking' in two different languages (Piekkari et al., 2014).

Baker (2011) discusses the importance of intercultural awareness when

communicating in ELF. Culture, language, and communication are hugely interrelated and thereby, cultural factors should be considered in all international communication – ELF included. This being said, however, the aspect of culture will not be included in the empirical questions of this study.

Overall, it can be concluded from the literature on language issues in multicultural organizations that the existence of some clear common ground for communication is crucial. In many cases lingua franca seems to be the optimal solution, but its challenges should be acknowledged as well. In conclusion, implementing a lingua franca does not solve all the issues, but many of the issues pointed out by research further support the notion of the importance of communication skills over technical language skills. Focusing on communicational skills enhance group cohesion and the creation of social relationships as well as minimize the negative impacts, such as exclusion – all of which may easily prove valuable to the organization.

2.3 Language and Group Cohesion in Multicultural Organizations

Group cohesion can be defined as ‘the force bringing group members closer together’ (Lauring & Selmer, 2010: 268). It is thought to have two dimensions to it: task-oriented and emotional (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Task-oriented group cohesion refers to how well the group works together and shares common goals (Beal et al., 2003). Emotional group coherence is conceptualized as being the ‘result of the social connection that members feel towards group members’ (Lauring and Selmer, 2010: 268–269).

Lauring and Selmer (2010) found that group cohesion and the use of lingua franca are linked in the context of multicultural organizations which are nearly always also multilingual organizations. In their research, Lauring and Selmer use three group cohesion variables together with the theoretical framework of English language consistency to measure group cohesion in multicultural organizations. The three variables are group involvement, group conflict, and group trust. English language consistency is defined as the extent to which English is used in personal, work-

related, and management communication (Lauring and Selmer, 2010).

Lauring and Selmer (2010) define language diversity as the number of different languages spoken in a multicultural organization. On the basis of previous research, there seems to be strong theoretical support for a negative association between language diversity and group involvement and group trust (Distefano & Maznevski, 2000; Henderson, 2005; Fredriksson et al., 2006). Remarkably, Lauring and Selmer's (2010) study does not support this finding. Based on the results, the number of languages spoken does not affect feelings of group cohesion. Moreover, Janssens and Steyaert (2014) suggest a multilingual approach to examine the role of language in international business. However, most scholars in the field of international business continue to agree on the importance of the use of a common language in an organization with language diversity.

Out of the three forms of English communication, personal, work-related, and managerial, Lauring and Selmer's (2010) study found the dominating factor behind group cohesion to be consistency in English management communication. Moreover, consistency in English management communication has been found to promote diversity climate in a multicultural organization (Lauring & Selmer, 2012a). As group cohesion is also related to social settings, not only work-related settings (task-oriented versus emotional group cohesion), this finding supports the idea that if the management is consistent with the use of a common language, it has a beneficial impact on social life within an organization. This linkage, however, is slightly contradictory to much of the research conducted in the field. Research has previously suggested that the implementation of a common language may have negative implications on social aspects in the organization (e.g. Charles and Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Janssens et al., 2004; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999; Welch et al., 2005).

Homophily is 'the tendency to associate with people like yourself' (Mäkelä et al., 2006: 3). It is a very fundamental human characteristic. From an evolutionary perspective it helps to keep the species from distinction, but in the modern day it may cause issues ranging from harmless, day-to-day matters like who one prefers to socialize with to severe issues like racism. Somewhere on this spectrum are the

issues homophily, or interpersonal similarity, might raise in multicultural organizations. It may have an impact on knowledge sharing (Mäkelä et al., 2006), interaction between employees (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999; Piekkari et al., 2005), and work-group involvement (Hobman et al., 2004), to mention a few. Homophily in the international business and, more precisely, multicultural organization setting is largely connected to group openness to diversity.

It is relatively safe to generalize that all expatriates suffer from culture shock of some degree (Shi & Wang, 2013). A study by Basow and Gaugler (2017) examined US college students' adjustment on a study abroad period. One of the main findings was that contact with locals decreased the difficulty of social adjustment. Furthermore, Yakunina et al. (2012) discovered that a set of personality traits they call the 'multicultural personality' helps internationals adapt in the new home country. These personality traits include, for instance, open-mindedness, cultural empathy, and social initiative.

There is a handful of studies examining international students' adjustment and perceptions of and openness to diversity (e.g. Yakunina et al., 2012; Basow & Gaugler, 2017). Once again, openness to diversity is a desirable quality. That mindset seems to help international students and MNC employees alike to adjust to the new, international setting (Yakunina et al., 2012; Luring & Selmer, 2012b). However, it seems that at least in educational settings, friendships between international students and locals are unfortunately not very common. MacKenzie and Baldassar (2016) give several, interrelated reasons for the lack of friendships between international and local students. Above all, these friendships might even be unimagined by locals. They rely much on the idea that similarity and affinity naturally lead to friendships. Therefore, they don't believe there could be any friendships between them. This finding relates much to Mäkelä et al.'s (2006) discussion on homophily as a driver of knowledge sharing.

The main take-away from the discussion is that there are fundamental human characteristics, like desire for interpersonal similarity, that drive our behavior. However, multicultural organizations should simultaneously acknowledge the existence of these drivers and aim to go beyond them. For example, the

characteristic of 'openness to diversity' should be cherished.

2.4 Work Motivation in Multicultural Organizations

Motivation is an immensely important construct for any organization as it is what drives the performance of the members in an organization. Since a multicultural organization is special in many ways compared to a more heterogenous organization, there may be some precise factors affecting the motivation of the members of a multicultural organization.

Rock (2011) sees a strong connection between group cohesion and staff motivation in a multicultural organization. More specifically, the research results imply that group cohesion creates stronger intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation emerging from the activity itself, for example from the enjoyment or challenge the activity provides (Barry & King, 2000). Extrinsic motivation, on the contrary, arises from outside the individual or the immediate nature of the task itself (Sternberg & Williams, 2002). Perhaps one of the most common sources of extrinsic motivation is monetary compensation. In other words, with stronger feelings of group cohesion, the staff members felt more motivated to, for example, genuinely help colleagues to achieve better results together. Consequently, intrinsic factors are most often a far more powerful source of motivation.

Gu et al. (2011) examined motivation among college students. They confirmed that, here too, group cohesion is an important factor in fostering motivation. This specific study was conducted among female college students, so it raises the question of whether the same significance would be found for male students.

The well-known, classic motivation theory by Maslow (1943) provides a straightforward, yet comprehensive, explanation for human motivation that can be easily applied to any setting. Maslow illustrates the human motivation as a pyramid of needs called The Hierarchy of Needs. These needs are the basis of motivation. On the very bottom, there is physiological needs such as food. Motivation for those arises from very basic survival instinct. Once these basic physiological needs are

satisfied, one is able to start climbing up the pyramid first to safety, next love and belonging, third esteem, and finally, on the very top of the pyramid, self-actualization meaning the desire to be the best version of oneself.

When the finding of group cohesion being one of the significant factors affecting motivation is reflected on Maslow's (1943) theory on human motivation, it seems that the need for group cohesion might arise from the human need to belong to a group. Moreover, being able to fluently express oneself in a language, make and understand jokes, as well as the group communicating in a shared language to start with, all affect feelings of belonging and consequently, motivation.

2.5 Conclusion

Much of the existing literature seems to agree that the implementation of a mutual language, lingua franca, has crucial implications for a multicultural organization. The means in which the implementation should be done as well as the perception of the implications differs somewhat, but a major trend is visible. This trend sees a well implemented lingua franca as a fundamental building block for both the well-being of the members in a multicultural organization as well as the success of the organization. Some of the factors behind this rationale include the creation of new social networks based on language proficiency (Vaara et al., 2005) and the language use being "highly contextual", meaning that it is easily used only in work-related situations (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010).

As argued in the beginning, it is clear from the literature that when it comes to multicultural organizations, language matters, group cohesion, and work motivation are at least to some degree dependable on each other. Naturally, there are numerous other factors affecting the above-mentioned issues, but in this study, focus will be put on language matters, group cohesion, and work motivation.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on much of the literature in international business, there seems to be many connections, links, and bridges between the areas of group cohesion, work motivation, and, finally, the lingua franca in a multicultural organization. It is safe to assume that many of the same principals can be found in a multicultural tertiary education setting. However, as education setting from the perspective of students is never the same as business operations, more research could be done to assess the issues specific to multicultural education settings. Furthermore, it seems that lingua franca impacts group cohesion, which in turn affects work motivation. Consequently, the following conceptual framework has arisen from the existing literature:

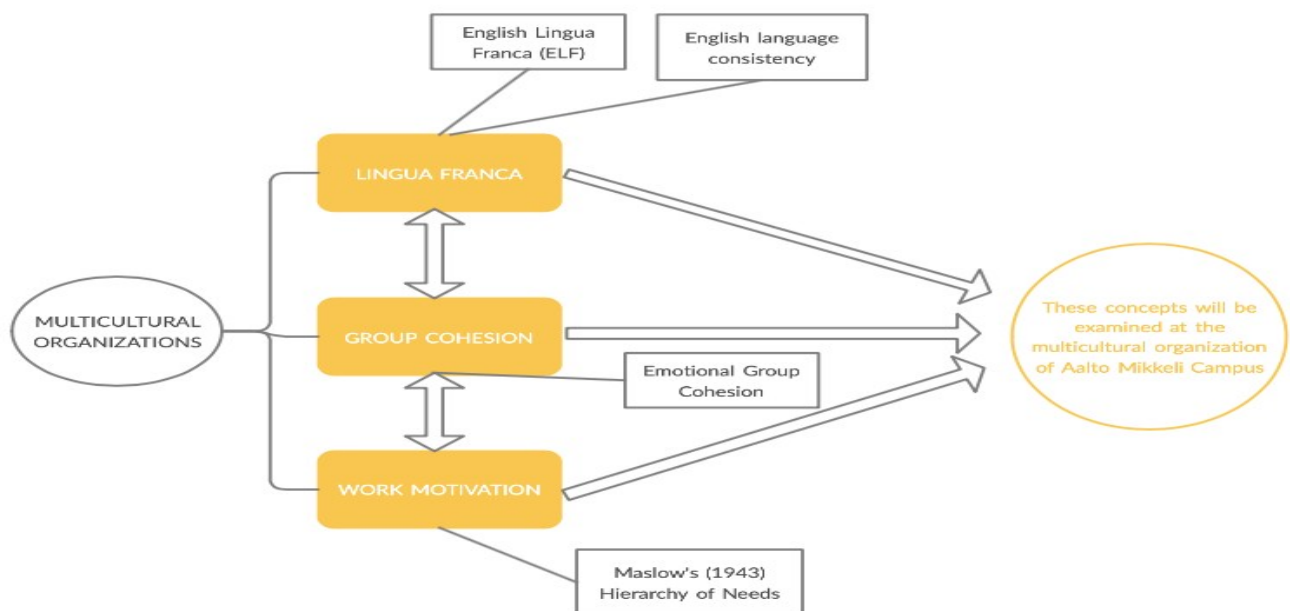


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

As we can see from figure 1, the empirical data gathered from an educational institution will be treated simply as data from a multicultural organization (MCO). There is no denying that there is a complex network of factors affecting different aspects in an MCO, but the three main concepts (lingua franca, group cohesion, work motivation) are the ones which will be looked at in this study.

Next, I will turn to the methodology which explains how the concepts will be used in more detail.

4. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

A qualitative and explanatory approach to the study was chosen in order to explain and understand the nature and consequences of language issues in the multicultural and multilingual organization studied. The approach was also used to find linkages between language issues, group cohesion, and work motivation among the members of the multicultural organization in question.

The research focuses on one university program in Finland with a high number of international degree students. Consequently, it is important to note that the data gathered provides in-depth information on the organization in question and describes its members' perceptions on the issues at hand, and thus does not aim to provide highly generalizable results.

4.1. Data Collection Method: A Combination of Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

The study relies on primary data collected from focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. The data collected is descriptive in nature. The student body of the Aalto Mikkeli study program was divided into three focus groups: Finnish students, Vietnamese students, and other international students.

The key distinction between the two latter groups is that there is a relatively high number of Vietnamese students attending the study program. Thus, they have their own tight-knit community within the whole student body. By differentiating 'other international students' from the Vietnamese students, it is possible to examine the role the existence of such a support group might play on the perceptions on the issues discussed in this study.

Finnish focus group was added to provide an opposing view and perhaps explanation from their perspective to the issues brought up in the two other focus groups.

A combination of two different research methods – focus groups and interviews – was chosen to ensure the quality and validity of the data. This is due to the somewhat delicate nature of the topic.

Focus groups were chosen for their nature of creating a safe, relaxed environment, where difficult ideas and opinions can be expressed with more ease as there are others who may share the same thoughts. Moreover, there is not such a strong juxtaposition between the interviewer and interviewee, allowing the focus group members to express themselves more freely. Discussion and interaction without the interference of the interviewer was encouraged. Each focus group had one focus group discussion of approximately 60–90 minutes in length.

Two one-on-one interviews per focus group demographic were conducted in addition to the focus group discussions. They gave an opportunity to discuss opinions that might be contradictory to the bigger group more freely. Thus, one of the main reasons the use of interviews was chosen to complement the focus group discussions was to help eliminate the peer pressure bias that may be a risk in focus group discussions. Not only might it be easier to tell ‘unpopular opinions’ in the interviews where no one else is listening, the interviewee also doesn’t have an ‘example answer’ from the other members that they might easily fall to agreeing with, even subconsciously.

These interviews were used to complement the focus group discussions by either finding similar results or a differing perspective to the issues. The interviews were approximately 40 minutes in length.

Achieving the purpose set for the one-on-one interviews was ensured by not only asking the same set of questions as in the focus group discussions, but by also bringing up themes or ideas that were found in the focus group discussions. Therefore, the focus group discussions were held prior to the interviews. Moreover, the Finnish focus group discussion and interviews were held only after enough data was gathered from the other groups in order to present themes that had arisen in earlier discussions to challenge the Finnish students.

In data analysis, the two sets of data were examined parallel to each other. Emphasis was on interpreting the results of each focus group discussion using the results from the interviews as complementing data to find similarities as well as differences in the answers given.

All the sessions were recorded and only transcribed to the extent necessary for quoting them. For confidentiality reasons, the recordings are kept in the possession of the researcher.

4.2 The Set-up of the Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

Conditions specific to the study program in question play a role in the interpretation of the data as well as the initial set-up of the research. For example, the term 'Mikkeli spirit' is used to learn about the participants' feelings of group cohesion. 'Mikkeli spirit' is a term used among the students and faculty pertaining to a strong sense of group cohesion.

All the questions that were asked were building up to whether the participants felt that English language lingua franca (ELF) is used sufficiently and well on campus. The discussions and interviews began with questions regarding their general attitude towards languages, background with English, and relationship with native language. From there, the questions slowly moved on to the use of ELF on campus.

Creating a certain atmosphere for the Finnish focus group discussion was crucial in order to ensure they did not feel attacked and would tell about their thoughts on ELF and other issues on campus openly.

4.3 Sample

Three focus groups were formed from the student body and two individual interviews per focus group were conducted in addition to the focus group discussion.

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined and used as follows:

International students:

Full-degree students enrolled in the program who do not speak or understand the Finnish language **or** do so very limitedly.

Vietnamese students:

Vietnamese full-degree students enrolled in the study program and who do not speak or understand Finnish.

Other international students:

Non-Finnish and non-Vietnamese full-degree students enrolled in the study program who do not speak or understand Finnish. Thus, a student with dual citizenship of Finland and some other country who does not for an unspecified reason speak or understand Finnish, **or** does so very limitedly, will be categorized as 'other international student'.

Finnish student

A full-degree student with Finnish nationality who considers themselves fluent in the Finnish language.

The following table gives the details concerning the data:

Type of Data	Group	Date	Duration	Members
Focus Group	Vietnamese	21 Jan 2020	55.09	6 members: 4 females, 2 males, 50/50 first- and second-year students
Interview	Other International Students	24 Jan 2020	42.32	Female, second- year student
Interview	Other International Students	25 Jan 2020	34.08	Male, second-year student
Focus Group	Finnish	3 Feb 2020	1.32.11	8 members: 50/50 male/female 50/50 first- and second-year students
Focus Group	Other International Students	4 Feb 2020	1.29.27	5 members representing 5 nationalities and native languages (2 females, 3 males, 2 first-year students, 3 second-year students
Interview	Finnish	4 Feb 2020	41.01	Female, first-year student)
Interview	Vietnamese	5 Feb 2020	47.48	Male, first-year student
Interview	Vietnamese	17 Feb 2020	38.29	Female, second- year student
Interview	Finnish	17 Feb 2020	32.54	Female, second- year student

Figure 2 Details on data

In addition to the group names used in the table, the additional terms presented below are used in the study:

International Finn

A full-degree student with Finnish nationality who considers themselves fluent in the Finnish language but has exceptional international background (e.g. lived abroad for a significant part of their life or schooling in English).

Support group

A group of full-degree students from the same nationality sharing the same mother tongue. The term is used with the Vietnamese and Finnish participants.

Regarding the Finnish focus group, two members with a highly international background, referred to as 'international Finns', were incorporated into the group.

4.4 Interpretation of the Data

Thematic analysis was used to understand general themes in the data. As the data is strongly qualitative and focuses largely on only a few individuals' perceptions on the issues in the specific environment, the main driver in analyzing the data was finding general themes as well as outliers throughout the three focus groups.

Conditions specific to the study program in question play a role in the interpretation of the data as well as the initial set-up of the research as discussed above.

4.5 Confidentiality

All focus group members and interviewees were assured of confidentiality and the data gathered has been processed fully anonymously and all identifying pieces of information have been changed or removed. Consequently, in some of the direct

quotes, names, places, and other facts that may result in identifying the person(s) in question have been changed.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings from the focus group discussions and interviews are presented below. The findings together with the analysis are presented in three different question categories and from each category only the most significant questions are raised for thorough analysis.

First, only the Vietnamese and other international students' perceptions on the issues are discussed, and in the last section, a 'Finnish perspective' is provided. To ease readability, the main phrases where the conclusions have been drawn may be bolded, and the most significant part may be both bolded and underlined.

5.1 Background Information on Participants

In order to interpret the findings with more detail, background information on the two following aspects was asked from all the participants. First, the participants were asked to describe their feelings and attitudes towards their native language. Next, they were asked to describe their relationship with the English language, ranging from their history using the language to their perceived language proficiency.

The information presented below is important in interpreting the answers of an individual participants in the appropriate context, thus providing valuable insights to the answering the research questions set for this study.

5.1.1 Relationship with One's Native Language

In this section, questions such as ‘what does your mother tongue mean to you?’, ‘is it important to you?’, ‘do you have a chance to speak it in Mikkeli? If so, is that important to you?’ were asked from the participants.

All the participants, with no regard to nationality, said very similar things about their feelings towards their native language. Below are the most frequently presented answers:

- Highly important
- Comfortableness
- Natural
- Misses the language if not able to use it

5.1.2 Relationship with the English Language

The focus group members’ and interviewees’ relationship with English was mapped with three main set questions:

1. their history with the language (schooling, lived abroad, etc.),
2. their perception on their language proficiency, including comfortableness and ease in using the language in daily life, and
3. comfortableness in using English with someone who they would normally use their native language with.

Once again, participants across all groups and nationalities shared the same thoughts. Most participants did feel quite confident and comfortable using English. However, they also agreed that communicating in English is not the same as communicating in their native language.

Naturally, there were some exceptions: those, who were extremely comfortable in using English, even more so than their native language, and

those who were not very comfortable using English and not that confident in their language skills.

The participants were also asked whether they feel uncomfortable speaking in English with people who they share a native language with and thereby, could be using their native language. The majority of the participants answered 'no' when it comes to people, they became acquainted with in Mikkeli, because they feel that the fact that from the first moments, they started communicating largely in English which makes it feel 'normal'. Especially the Finnish focus group members emphasize the affect 'the language they started with when they first met the person' has on this.

5.2 Language Matters: English Language Usage on Campus

From here on, findings will be discussed in the following order: first, the perceptions and answers given by the international students are discussed, and lastly, the Finnish perspective is provided to give further insight on the

5.2.1 Encountering Situations where English Not Used

When asked if the participants have ever been in situations where Finnish or another dominant language that they do not understand has been used even if they have been present, the answers were shockingly clear. Everyone answered 'yes', and below are a few examples of the specific answers given:

"Yeah, like every day." (Other international students interviewee 1)

"Yes, definitely." (Vietnamese focus group member)

"That has happened to me too many times to count." (Other international students focus group member)

"Umm, I mean, maybe every day, you know." (Vietnamese interviewee 1)

"That just happened to me this morning." (Vietnamese interviewee 2)

While most gave a simple, somewhat bewildered and amused answer of 'yes', as they knew that the researcher had also encountered those situations innumerable times, a Vietnamese interviewee elaborated on their answer:

"It's [speaking Finnish instead of English] very common here, I don't know why. I think it is very common among the second year students. They gather in the Aquarium, the Finnish students, and they talk in Finnish. **'Okayy, umm, should I pass the people, or...?' It's very weird when you can't understand everything.**"

What the interviewee refers to here, are the breaks from lectures during a day on campus. 'Aquarium' is a study area with sofas, where students often gather during breaks. Interestingly, this extract reveals the first situation, where neglecting the use of English is encountered: social gatherings at breaks.

In the bolded part, the interviewee indicates feelings of confusion and ambiguity due to not understanding the language and thus not knowing what is going on or how to behave. Importantly, similar feelings were widely indicated by other participants as well, which will be discussed further in the following section.

As the second major situation, where the participants feel like the use of English is neglected, is social media. In the focus group of Vietnamese students, communication in social media came up early on in the discussion. Interestingly enough, the participants seemed to put much emphasis on the use of English in social media channels shared by the students. When the focus group was asked if they have encountered situations where Finnish or another dominant language that they do not understand has been used even if they have been present, the immediate answer was:

“Yes, even in our own class WhatsApp group.”

Later on, the discussion returned to the topic of communication in social media channels:

Focus Group Member 1:

”I think it’s especially rude when you use WhatsApp group or any, like, social media. You can actually have private messages but they still use their language [Finnish] in the whole group which consists of international students as well.”

Focus Group Member 2:

”Yeah, I stopped checking the WhatsApp group.”

Similar thoughts were heard from the other focus groups as well as interviews.

The thoughts of the participants discussed in this section are the most relevant to the research questions and strongly illustrate the participants’ experiences and thoughts that guided the discussions that followed.

5.2.2 Feelings that Arise when English Is Not Used

The range of feelings that neglecting the use of English raises in the participants is broad but coherent. The feelings the participants named are very intuitive and easily understandable. Next, the variety of feelings will be discussed by category.

1. Feelings of exclusion

The dominant group was feelings of exclusion expressed in different ways. The phrase ‘left out’ was repeated throughout the focus groups and interviews. It was the first feeling all the participants, except for one interviewee, who focused on being annoyed for not being able to contribute to the conversation

(discussed later in more detail), said when asked how it makes them feel if English is not used around them.

“I always feel a little bit like an outsider because I never know what is going on.” (Other international students focus group member 1)

“I feel sometimes thrown out from the conversation.” (Other international students focus group member 2)

2. Feelings of confusion and uncertainty

A large group of feelings were feelings of confusion. Most of all the participants described feelings and thoughts pertaining to confusion when a language they do not understand is used around them or in other words, English is not used.

Participants stated things like not knowing **how to react** or **what to say** when they find themselves in situations where English is not used. A few members explained how in very day-to-day situations on campus they are not **sure how to approach Finnish students** if they are talking in Finnish. An example given was being uncertain whether they should say hello or not, and as a solution deciding to leave it up to the Finnish student to greet them or not. In many cases, Finns haven't said hello to the participants. On the other hand, a member of the Vietnamese focus group points out that in a sense, greeting Finnish students speaking Finnish gives them an 'official reason to interrupt the conversation'. Mentions of being 'afraid to step in and ask what is going on' arose in the other international students focus group discussion.

A member of the Vietnamese focus group points out something s/he calls '**language switching**' causing uncertainty and confusion as well as difficulty in approaching Finnish students:

Focus group member 1: “The thing about the breaks is that, umm, if I leave the class and go to the bathroom then I will meet some other girls that will use English with me but when I walk

away they will turn back to Finnish. So it's like language switching."

Interviewer: "How does that make you feel?"

Focus group member 1: "I think it makes them a little bit more difficult to approach."

Focus group member 2: "Yeah, same thing. Sometimes I feel like 'oh shoot, you're speaking in Finnish right now, I don't want to interrupt'. And then, like, when they do switch to English to talk to me I'm like 'okay this is nice', but then as soon as I leave and they switch back to Finnish I'm like 'oh shoot I was really interrupting them I should not have done that'."

These feelings of uncertainty and confusion at times lead to a perception among the participants that they are somehow disliked by the Finnish students since they are very often speaking Finnish instead of using English around them. This perception mainly arises from firstly, not knowing what is being talked about, if it's maybe something bad about them, and, secondly, simply the fact of not being included.

3. Feelings of being a 'burden' to the others

The extract above leads us to the next theme: feelings of being a '**burden**' because not knowing the language. This feeling may present itself in the form of feeling like one is interrupting a conversation if walking in when a language they don't understand is used, as described above, or alternatively some of the participants used the word 'burden' directly.

A Vietnamese interviewee described a situation, where s/he felt like a burden because s/he was the only one who did not understand Finnish:

"I think the worst one is when I was in the X course and we had a quick presentation we needed to prepare in 30 minutes so we needed to discuss and I was in a group – I wanted to be in international communities but I ended up realizing I was in Finnish communities, not international. It was 10 people, including me, and some of them just start by 'Okay, so is everyone here Finnish?' and I am the only one who is not Finnish. **I felt weird. I was like the**

reason they can't [speak Finnish]. And I was like 'Should I leave this team..?'"

4. Feelings of frustration for not being able to join the conversation

A clear theme across all focus groups and interviews are feelings of frustration for not being able to join the conversation as they do not understand the language. For those who understand what is being talked about it is easy to simply throw in a comment at one point without initially directly being part of the conversation. On the contrary, as someone who does not understand the language but is in the same situation, let's say sitting on the same sofas during a break, the situation is very different as they have no chance of jumping into the conversation. The fact that they are 'not even given a chance to contribute' seems to irritate many of the participants.

A member of the focus group of other international students describes their frustration as follows:

"They speak [Finnish] and they are in their situation and then they say 'oh we were talking about this'. And I'm like I don't care what you are talking about, I don't need to know the summary. **It would be nice to understand and then maybe I can say something at the right time.** So it doesn't make a difference if they do that [give a summary]."

Once a summary is given, the students often do switch to English. However, this same focus group member has encountered situations where they keep talking in Finnish despite recognizing the presence of someone who doesn't know Finnish:

"The worst part of this Finnish thing is that when they say 'ooh I'm sorry that we are speaking in Finnish' and they continue speaking in Finnish. – Sometimes it's been so annoying that I just leave. Because, like, it doesn't make sense. If you're sorry, then change it."

An interviewee belonging to other international students states this as their main or only problem with the excessive usage of Finnish:

“That I can’t engage in the conversation. That’s the only thing that annoys me. Like, I don’t mind the language, but **I would like to know what is going on, maybe engage in the conversation somehow.**”

When asked if s/he feels anything else than annoyed for not being able to engage in the conversation, (for example left out, a phrase that has been prevalent throughout the discussions and the interviews) s/he answers the following:

“No, I’m just annoyed. Like, I would like to talk but I don’t know what’s going on, what’s the topic, and I don’t know how to talk, so.”

This frustration seemed to be less present among the Vietnamese focus group. They seemed to emphasize the feelings of confusion.

5. Feelings of understanding

In addition to the negative feelings that many of the international students experience, across both international focus groups and all international interviews, there is a very strong sense of empathy or understanding towards those Finnish students who choose to use Finnish even though there are people present who do not understand the language. A dominant trend seems to be that the international students feel that they would most likely do the same themselves.

A Vietnamese focus group member says ‘it works both ways’, referring to the fact that as there is a significant number of Vietnamese students on the campus, they might be inclined to speak Vietnamese instead of English as well.

“But I feel like it works the same way for us as well. When a group is dominantly Vietnamese, we **tend to switch back to Vietnamese**. So it **works both ways**.” (Vietnamese focus group member)

A member of the Vietnamese focus group who strongly expressed feelings of being 'left out' when Finnish is used around him/her, later described his/her understanding towards the Finnish students:

Interviewer:	"So how does it make you all feel? You said left out?"
Focus group member 1:	"Yeah, but, like, I'm okay with it. "
Interviewer:	"Why do you think you're okay with it?"
Focus group member 1:	"I think I <u>would do the same</u> if there is a big Vietnamese group. It's like more natural . And when I do that it means no offence. "

Moreover, a focus group member of other international students states the following:

"I feel like it's not something you do on purpose; it **just kind of happens.**"

An interviewee belonging to other international students who earlier described being annoyed for not being able to engage in the conversation very firmly declined any feelings of being offended and therefore continued to show the same understanding towards those who tend to neglect the use of English as the rest of the participants.

"Oh, no, not offended. I give people excuses." (Other international students interviewee)

A member of the Vietnamese focus group reflects upon own experiences when s/he had used Vietnamese even though there has been others, in this case close friends, present who do not know Vietnamese, showing profound understanding towards Finnish students who incline to using Finnish even if English would be more appropriate:

"With my friendship group, most of us are Vietnamese, but we have a Portuguese and a Canadian [nationalities changed] person. And sometimes, we make the mistake of talking Vietnamese and like they always get really upset and like obviously they should because when we're all hanging out together, **we should use the common language. It's just really disrespectful.**"

Consequently, there seems to be two pulling forces in the minds of international students when it comes to feelings on the topic. The usage of Finnish language around them makes them feel a range of negative feelings, mostly being upset in some way, but the force pulling from the other side is a strong sense of empathy. Many of the answers given by the participants were constructed like this: 'when it happens, I feel upset, but I understand it, but I still feel upset'. A member of the focus group of other international students described a typical situation and their feelings on it as follows:

"Let's say I'm out with some friends and we meet some Finnish people and everybody starts speaking Finnish and I'm like 'man, I really wish I understood what was going on'. I start feeling a bit like an outsider all the time because I'm usually the only one who doesn't speak Finnish. And, you know, like **of course I'm not mad at my friends for ditching me**, really – I mean they're not like ditching me but they kind of are, in a sense, but **they don't realize it** and **it's not really their fault**. They just start talking Finnish because they understand it. And like, you know **I understand it, it's fine, but, you know, it – it just sucks.**"

Finally, members of the other international students focus group mention how the feelings neglecting English raises in them has changed over time. In the beginning of their time in Aalto Mikkeli many of them felt more strongly about the issue. Now, due to deeper understanding, getting used to it, finding their own group of friends, or some other reason has made them feel less strongly about the issue.

For example, one focus group member described their approach to the situation:

"In the beginning it felt more like disrespect, but then it kind of became fine. So usually, for example, I wait until people finish and ask any person to just say what was told and then kindly ask them to just begin to discuss in English."

However, the issue continues to bother them on a daily basis. A few focus group members note how now-a-days it depends on the day how deeply it affects them:

“Some days are more upsetting than others and some days you just give up and say 'okay whatever I'm not understanding and I don't care' and some other days you really want to understand and be part of it and **stop feeling like an outsider.**”

5.2.3 Proposed Reasons Behind Neglecting the Use of English

Three main group of thought on why the Finnish students seem to be inclined to speaking Finnish even in situations where English would be the more appropriate option. Firstly, the Finnish culture was brought up in the other international students focus group. Secondly, personality traits were brought up.

Focus group members contemplated whether the culture makes Finns insecure to use the language.

Furthermore, an interviewee from the group of other international students presented the interviewer a question:

Interviewee: “Are you taking cultural differences into consideration in your study?”
Interviewer: “No, I have narrowed them out.”
Interviewee: “Why?! **I think it's all about cultural differences.**”

S/he continues to describe how in some cultures people are far more open to acquainting themselves with different kinds of people and the culture in general might be more social compared to Finland. S/he believes that the Finnish culture might very well be a root cause for why the Finnish students might not even realize that they are doing something that might feel bad for someone from a different culture – hence, not actively taking the international students to the conversation by changing language.

To further support the finding that cultural background plays a significant role in how people behave and how others perceive that behavior, a member of

the focus group of other international students mentioned something similar in the focus group discussion. S/he told about personal experiences when s/he had been somewhat offended by actions, or more specifically the lack of actions, by Finnish friends. While attending a university course called Intercultural Management, s/he realized many things about the Finnish culture that did not match the cultural context s/he had been brought up in and lived in before moving to Finland for university studies. Accordingly, what to him/her had been somewhat upsetting behavior, was very normal to those brought up in the Finnish cultural context.

Regarding feelings of exclusion from the Finnish student body, a Vietnamese interviewee pointed out something that supports the notion of the significance of culture:

“I feel that it's not that they [Finnish students] do not want to take us into the community but they **don't know how our [Vietnamese] community works.**”

Personality traits as a factor affecting the decision to refrain from using English were brought up as well by the participants. The traits that were mentioned are shyness and insecurity. How the participants see it, these traits might hinder their willingness to step out of their comfort zone, Finnish language and Finnish people. This could also easily be linked to the subject of culture, since the main factor regarding culture, according to the participants, was how reserved Finns seem.

A common reason given for this behavior is how on some instances the Finnish students have been speaking English but haven't known a word or a phrase in English, so they quickly switch to Finnish to ask another Finn about the word, sometimes resulting in the conversation changing into Finnish entirely.

Finally, a member of the other international students focus group makes an interesting remark that perhaps speaking Finnish during the breaks from class,

for example, is a retreat from using English in class; a way to switch their thoughts to free time mode from working mode.

In conclusion, the speculated reasons for the behavior seem to revolve largely around the notion that using Finnish is easier, more natural, and more familiar than using English. After examining the thoughts of the Finnish students, this seems to be a fairly accurate conclusion by the participants. A closer look on the Finnish students' perspective will be taken in section 5.5.

5.3 Language Matters and Group Cohesion

A set of questions revolving around the topics of who do the students spend most of their time with at school, who do they consider their friends, and do they attend student events, was asked to measure group cohesion between international and Finnish students on the campus. In addition, the participants were asked to tell whether they would say they identify themselves more with the whole student body of Aalto Mikkeli or rather a smaller part of the community, e.g. international students.

On some instances, the participants themselves brought up directly the result that could be hypothesized from their answers to the questions above: the division between international and Finnish students. Consequently, the results regarding group cohesion among the entire student body, so including both international and Finnish students seem to be quite clear: a significant portion of the international students do not perceive themselves as part of the student body as a whole, feel excluded, and perceive a division, or a barrier, even, between international and Finnish students.

5.2.1 Who do you spend time with?

As in the context of Mikkeli Campus, it is quite likely that the friends of the students are from the campus unless they are originally from the Mikkeli region. Therefore, the participants were asked to describe that who do they

consider their group of friends and who do they spend their time with in Mikkeli.

The results were quite clear. International students mostly spend their time with other international students and, more specifically, Vietnamese students spend most of their time with the Vietnamese student body.

Many of the participants are, however, somewhat disappointed or unhappy with getting to spend time only with other international students and not that much with Finnish students. This finding was especially prominent among Vietnamese participants, who felt like they were somewhat forced to spend time mostly with other Vietnamese students. Naturally, they also described the existence of good, close friendships with the Vietnamese students, but most of the Vietnamese participants brought up the fact that they feel, to some degree, tied to the Vietnamese community due to a couple of reasons.

Firstly, the collectivist culture is mentioned. They must stick together as a community. Secondly, they feel like the other students, mostly Finnish students as they do describe friendships with other international students, do not give them any other chance but to be with the Vietnamese community. Below is an extract from an interview with a Vietnamese student, who would very much like to spend more time with the Finnish students:

“Finnish students **don’t invite us to their private parties**, so we have to spend that time with Vietnamese.”

S/he as a person seems to have strong aspirations and likes to challenge him/herself. S/he tells how s/he would love to learn about the Finnish culture through friendships with the Finnish students, but it feels difficult at times:

“I want to be someone in the society and I want to develop myself, so that’s the key point of going abroad: you need to develop yourself and be open to other cultures. **But it’s really difficult for me if other people from the other culture don’t open to me.**”

Later, s/he makes a rather fundamental remark:

"I want to find friends, not nationalities."

S/he also adds an interesting description theorizing the combination of the Vietnamese and Finnish perspectives leading into such situation:

"Take it from my perspective, I am scared and I am not confident to communicate with people from other cultures if I don't understand enough. So maybe some Finnish students think the same. When I have had some conversations with Finnish students like Matti and Teppo [names changed], they are really open and they told me that they would want to integrate more to the Vietnamese community and that they would want to have more Vietnamese students in the Finnish events but we just don't come. And if we come, we just integrate with each other in our groups. So I think that it's more like Finnish people are just used to what they have had since childhood. When they see a bunch of Vietnamese they might want to befriend but they are just scared and they are not confident enough."

Finally, linked to the previous extract, s/he adds the possibility of culture playing a role:

"We [Vietnamese] are shy and Finnish people are also shy so no-one talks to each other."

Since a majority of the participants said that they do not spend much time with the Finnish students, some of them were asked whether they think they have tried to make friends with the Finnish students. There are four major categories within answers: those, who never really tried, those, who tried but quit at some point, those who still try, and those who succeeded in making friends with Finnish students.

Those who said that they never really tried are very rare. In the Vietnamese focus group, the members discussed how from the first days of orientation week in the very beginning of their studies they already felt like making friends with the Finns was 'a lost case'. At that point, it was also easy for them to rely on spending time with other Vietnamese students as they were all in the same situation: in a new foreign country with strangers whose language they cannot

understand. After closely spending time with the Vietnamese community in the very first days and weeks, it was difficult to break away from that later on.

The group of international students who tried for some time, but eventually quit trying, is far larger than those who never really tried. Many reasons are given by the participants for not really wanting to try or, alternatively, quitting at one point. One Vietnamese focus group member says s/he is 'not motivated at all' to get to know the Finnish students, and another one says it 'feels difficult to try'. A third member describes a lack of belonging to the community in the long term as a reason for not trying that hard to mingle with the Finnish students:

"One reason for this may be that I don't see the long term that I am attached to this community. Like, I am thinking that I'm going to Vietnam after being here so I don't see myself in a long term commitment with the community."

A fourth member explains how they think it depends on one's personality, whether they are able to make friends with the Finnish students:

"I also feel like it depends on your personality, like whether you are outgoing or not, because if you actually try to make friends with the Finnish, like for instance Mary, she tried to go to the sits and other events as well and I feel like she actually has been accepted into the community as a whole. Not like us, we didn't try at all and we feel that we were actually left out but we actually didn't really make an effort to make friends."

The participants who said that they are still trying to get to know the Finnish students more, show a strong sense of persistency as well as genuine curiosity and willingness to not only mingle with others in a similar situation (i.e. international students) but to reach a deeper relationship with others as well. However, even those experience the situation as somewhat difficult or hopeless, even. Below are two extracts from participants who say that they keep trying to integrate to the Finnish student body.

"I still try to, but since I also went back to my comfort zone of not trying to talk to the very very – you know, those kind of group of Finnish people who don't want to be exposed to international atmosphere so with them that's harder. But again, there are so many people, like those who try to speak to exchange students and international students and with them it feels more comfortable." (Other international students focus group member)

“I want to be someone in the society and I want to develop myself, so that’s the key point of going abroad: you need to develop yourself and be open to other cultures. But it’s really difficult for me if other people from the other culture don’t open to me.” (Vietnamese interviewee; extract found also earlier in this section)

Lastly, there are those individuals who really have crossed the boundary between internationals and Finns. A few of them took part in this study, the rest are mentioned by the participants as an example.

A major theme across all the four categories is that they largely feel like creating friendships with the Finnish students is their responsibility and without their effort, the division between them and the Finnish students would be even wider. Below are some extracts to further illustrate this finding.

“I feel like it is the international student’s responsibility to make the first move.”
(Other international students focus group member)

Interviewee: We really want to learn it [cultural things] but we can’t because it’s really difficult to start a conversation like that with Finns because **some of them might feel it’s not necessary.**

Interviewer: Can you expand on that? What do you mean by ‘not necessary’?

Interviewee: Umm, like, some of the Finnish students on our campus are really open but some of them are not, and they might think that ‘Oh I can just stick to my Finnish society and I can talk to them [international students] because they are the majority here so I don’t need to have any other friends from other cultural groups.

(Vietnamese interviewee)

“Some days I feel like giving up but other days you I feel that I need to do it [keep approaching Finns] because otherwise I will close myself.” (Other international students focus group member)

In conclusion, it seems that many of the participants perceive getting to know the Finnish students as something that requires a lot of work. Nonetheless, some international students have broken these expectations and made close relationships with the Finnish students. Majority of them, however, spend their time mostly with other international students. In addition, ‘Finnish students who speak English’ seem to be liked among internationals. It could be argued

that an important decision criterion is whether they can trust the person they are spending their time with to stick to using English.

5.2.2 Social Events on Campus

Social events are a very fundamental part of the Finnish student life and certainly an important part of integrating to Aalto Mikkeli. Attending social events can therefore be seen as a factor pertaining to feelings of group cohesion among the students.

In the following extract from an interview with a Vietnamese student, the interviewee provides a rather comprehensive description on factors specific to them regarding why they previously wouldn't but now does go to university events. Based on the focus group discussions and interviews, these thoughts seem to be shared by other international students as well.

Interviewee: "When we started our schoolyear –"

Interviewer: "You mean our [second years] freshman year?"

Interviewee: "Yeah, our freshman year. I felt like I am **not confident enough** because I **don't know you** and you **don't know me** either, and as we talked before, **Finnish people stick to each other and Vietnamese people stick to each other**. Then what's the point of me going to those kinds of events if my friends don't go there? And I feel like, because I **don't understand** you guys, what are your habits, what are your favorite movies and singers, so how can I integrate myself to you guys so I just stopped myself from going to those kind of events. **Even though I'm an outgoing person**. Then I started to come there more when I pulled myself together and thought that 'Okay, I'm studying abroad; **what's the point of studying abroad if you can't integrate yourself to the culture**'. So, I started going to Pentti, and to sits, and to Vappu, to Möbba, and all the things, and I started loving Finnish culture."

In short, the extract conveys the following:

- (1) Not being confident enough to approach new people from a different culture and language group
- (2) Effect of culture – both in the way Finns and Vietnamese interact but also not knowing the interests of the person from a very different culture

- (3) Not going to social events despite being an outgoing person
- (4) Finally, the strong realization of wanting to experience studying abroad to its fullest and, thus, challenging oneself and going to those events.

Language issues quickly arise in the discussion on attending events. Many feel that the uncertainty of whether English will be used in those social, unofficial settings, affect their willingness to attend the events. Some participants say that it is upsetting to notice how all the official parts (information, ticket sale, etc.) is operated in English, but once the event itself begins, the Finnish language rules.

“In social events like sits or other events they just speak finnish and I just feel like I cannot blend in if I do not know the language.” (Vietnamese focus group member)

Due to this, some participants say that they must ‘mentally prepare’ before going to an event. Below are the feelings of one participant who feels this way.

“It’s weird, even though I know all these people and I’m comfortable with a lot of them, there’s always a small part of me that feels anxious before I go to social events in Mikkeli. ‘Cause it’s always like, am I going to be an outsider this time?” (Other international students focus group member)

Two main reasons given are, firstly, the risk of feeling excluded from the others due to language barriers and, secondly, not having people to go to events – at least people who use English with a low threshold. Often it is a combination of the two, as described by the participant in the previous extract who also says s/he has to double check who is going to the event.

“I really wish that I didn’t have to think about that [who is attending the event]. I mean, of course, even if I go to an event where nobody of my friend group is going, I still know I can talk to somebody. ... So, I know that worst case scenario I will have people to talk to but at the same time I know that those people will also, you know, maybe **start speaking Finnish and exclude me without even realizing it**. So that’s why I feel like I always have to kind of like mentally prepare myself for that.” (Other international students focus group member)

As the study program is in Finland, naturally a significant part of the student life and its traditions are somehow linked to the Finnish language. Several participants brought up how at these 'sits-parties', where students get together, eat, drink, and sing, all the songs are in Finnish. For this reason, some feel like there is no point in going to those events, whereas others don't mind the traditional songs being in Finnish and find their own way of enjoying the events.

The study program's student union also organizes events marketed as 'international events'. Those events often do not involve alcohol, which to some of the participants is one of the reasons they prefer not to attend many of the other events. A Vietnamese interviewee says that she is disappointed that the Finnish students very rarely attend the events marketed as 'international events', so once again a forum for building bridges between the Finnish and international student bodies is lost.

"It's really sad when I go there [international events] and I feel like we are not doing well on that part. ... I think we need to do something for Finnish students to be more interested in that [going to those events & mixing with international students]."

Finally, the participants' feelings on the concept of 'Mikkeli Spirit' (see section 4.2) were asked. Based on the answers, it seems that a concept that is supposed to be program wide, touching all members of the Aalto Mikkeli community indifferent of nationality or language, is a privilege of the Finnish student body.

To further support this finding, when the participants were asked whether they identify themselves more with the entire student body or with a smaller part of it, nearly everyone told they identify themselves mostly with other international students.

"No matter how I try, I can't be a part of it, I don't feel that Mikkeli Spirit, I can't feel it." (Other international students focus group member)

All in all, there seems to be a division between the Finnish and international student bodies. Some individuals feel it stronger than others, many think that some successfully defy that division, but all international participants agree that there is no proper group cohesion between the Finnish and international students.

5.3 Study Motivation

Based on the discussions and interviews, there does not seem to be a significant connection between study motivation and language issues (together with group cohesion) among the participants. The participants list very intuitive factors that they feel impact their study motivation.

Only the Vietnamese focus group brought language issues up as something that they believe has an effect on their study motivation:

“If English is used more frequently on campus then international students will feel like they belong more to the community and that is definitely something that motivates you in your studies.”

“We'd also feel more comfortable with approaching other students to discuss things outside of class and everything like that because otherwise we just be talking to the same Vietnamese people asking like 'oh what did you get for this question' and that doesn't really help, it's all just the same anyway.”

The Vietnamese focus group looks at the issue also from a different perspective: the fact they do not, either, speak much English as they can easily rely on Vietnamese.

“If we [Vietnamese] speak English more we might have more friends and then at least, like, we have the motivation to go to school. Yeah, because like, everywhere we speak Vietnamese so what's the point really getting to school and meeting new people because it's all those same people that we are talking to anyway.” (Vietnamese focus group member 1)

“This [language issues] sometimes makes me have second thoughts about my decision to go abroad to study, if I speak Vietnamese too often.” (Vietnamese focus group member 2)

It seems that largely the perception is that studying is unrelated to social life. Also, many of the international students tend to take their studies rather seriously and feel very privileged to be studying abroad and thus would not list the social issues as something affecting their study motivation. A member of the focus group of other international students described their thoughts as follows:

“Sometimes I feel like the social part affects it, but I’m just thinking like, okay, I came here to study so even if this part is not going well, ... if I am feeling bad for being excluded I still have to use this time for my studies. ... I have to see for my future, I shouldn’t let it affect.”

5.4 Effect of ‘Support Group’

The variable of having a ‘support group’ of students from the same nationality sharing a native was examined throughout the study. In order to examine the possible impact, Vietnamese students formed their own focus group. This allowed the comparison between Vietnamese students and other international students. For assessing the effect of a support group, Finnish students were included in the study as well.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Vietnamese participants seemed to experience the issues of language and group cohesion somewhat more deeply and/or strongly than many of the participants belonging to other international students.

In addition to their perception on the issues discussed, the existence of a support group has quite expectable consequences. For example, in the very beginning of their studies, it was easy for the Vietnamese students to rely on spending time with other Vietnamese students instead of getting to know other people which can be somewhat uncomfortable at first when everything is new and odd. Now, they feel like they are somewhat trapped in friendships with mainly the Vietnamese. Furthermore, those few who stated that they never really tried to make friends with the Finnish students are most present among the Vietnamese participants – perhaps because it was very easy to rely on the Vietnamese community.

The Vietnamese focus group was directly asked whether they feel that the fact that they have many other Vietnamese students on campus might affect the issues discussed in the focus group. The answer was a clear ‘yes’.

“Yeah, definitely plays a big role. When we felt lost in the beginning, it was easy to go to other Vietnamese.”

As for Finnish students, the effect of a support group is much clearer. It seems as if their entire set of behavior is based on having the safety and comfort provided by belonging to the majority on campus. Moreover, peer pressure to not be the one changing a conversation to English, might be indirectly caused by the support group.

The main takeaway from this section is that the existence of a support group for the Vietnamese students does play some role in what way they are integrated to the student body. However, having a support group does not make the Vietnamese participants feel any less upset about the insufficient usage of English following in feelings of lack of group cohesion among the students. On the contrary, for the Finnish students, the existence of a support group impacts their behavior immensely.

5.5 Finnish Students’ Perspective

Finnish students were incorporated in the study for the purpose of gaining knowledge on the perceptions of the other side – the people who are mainly held accountable for the feelings many of the international students seem to be experiencing.

In this section, a concise summary will be given on the thoughts of the Finnish students.

5.5.1 Perceptions on the Use of English on Campus

“I think it was something we held on to for like a couple of months, but I think after that it started to crumble and people defaulted to Finnish. It happens, like – you get tired of constantly trying and your brain just goes overdrive. ... It just defaults to Finnish.” (Finnish focus group member)

In the extract above a member of the Finnish focus group rather honestly explains their perception on the use of English among the Finnish students. All the Finnish participants agree that they often do use Finnish even if there is an international student present.

Five major themes are visible in the Finnish participants comments on the topic:

1. Defaulting to Finnish, because it's more comfortable, easier to express oneself, etc.
2. Acknowledging that their actions might hurt someone, but continuing to act that way
3. Experiencing social pressure to not be the one who asks to turn the conversation to English
4. Feeling that others might not 'catch up' if one tries to switch to English
5. Believing that it is sufficient if they only use English when they talk to international students directly

1. Defaulting to Finnish

It seems that the Finnish students very much prefer using Finnish, especially in unofficial, social contexts, and easily default to Finnish instead of English – understandably so, as it is their native language.

“I think I default to Finnish when there's other people around who know Finnish around me. Of course, if there's some people around me who don't speak Finnish I immediately switch to English – most of the time. I usually feel bad for those people around me, and especially exchange students, who don't understand Finnish and everyone around them speaks Finnish, especially during lunch or something like that.” (Finnish focus group member)

This is understandable behavior but based on the international participants comments, it seems to cause the international students a spectrum of negative feelings.

2. Acknowledging that their actions might hurt someone, but continuing to act that way

Most of the Finnish participants do express a great deal of empathy towards the international students but simultaneously they all confess the excessive use of Finnish even in situations where English might be the more appropriate choice.

“I see Robert [name changed] is there, and I see he’s on his phone, probably because he can’t attend the conversation. I do feel bad about it, and I might even be like ‘ah, I wanna speak English’ but I would kind of be the one to – ‘cause sometimes when I speak Finnish and then I switch to English, sometimes people don’t pick up, they don’t like actually realize that ‘ah, you’re trying to switch it’ and they just continue answering in Finnish.” (Finnish focus group member)

3. Experiencing social pressure to not be the one who asks to turn the conversation to English

The topic of being somehow afraid or embarrassed to be the one to switch the conversation to English was strongly present in both of the Finnish interviews and discussed also in the focus group. Some stated that they would want to be the one asking everyone to switch the conversation into English if they witness someone in the group who does not understand Finnish. However, in reality they rarely do that. They say that they feel uncomfortable speaking up in those situations. When asked why they think that is, they find it difficult to give a clear reason. After some discussion, the reasons given were mainly the following: feeling like they disrupt the flow of the conversation perhaps causing an awkward silence as the conversation might not start flowing in English and not wanting to be ‘that person’ who might be seen as ruining a good conversation.

Interestingly enough, a member of the other international focus group speculated on the same. S/he said it might be 'difficult for Finnish students to tell everyone to switch to English'.

4. Feeling that others might not 'catch up' if one tries to switch to English

Related to what is described above, several members describe often encountering situations where they have tried to switch the conversation into English in a more subtle way by making a remark in English, hoping that people will understand what they are suggesting and change to English. However, oftentimes the others do not realize to change to English.

5. Believing that it is sufficient if they only use English when they talk to international students directly

Regarding when exactly the use of English is necessary on campus, some of the Finnish focus group members seemed to have a rather straightforward view on the matter based on the comments and answers provided. They say that if they would directly want to talk to international students, of course they will use English, but if it is a large group discussion where several conversations might overlap, there is not necessarily a use nor possibility to use English. However, another focus group member provided an opposing view:

"It would definitely be a lot more easier to people if we were speaking in English cause then they could just kind of join – slide into the conversation – whereas if we're speaking Finnish it's kind of hard to interrupt and ask to switch to English."

The extract above exhibits exactly what nearly all the international participants perceived as one of the main problems: not having the same chance to contribute to the conversation, as well as the difficulty of interrupting and asking to change the language.

Finally, regarding the choice of the 'international Finns' in the focus group, it is clear that they behave quite differently. The difference in the amount of

English that is used among students between the first and second years on campus has been discussed throughout all the focus groups. As a Finnish focus group member suggests, the difference might arise from the fact that first graders have far more ‘international Finns’ than second years.

The following extract from the Finnish focus group accurately describes the attitude many of the first graders seem to have – unlike the second graders as a whole:

“Yeah I do remember some of you second graders telling us that ‘wow why are you talking in English, like, every one of you is Finnish, why are you using English?’. But it was like – I felt that it’s, like, comfortable to speak in English. Cause then you don’t have to think who comes to the conversation and you don’t have to switch at that point.”

The data from the interviews give very similar results that strongly support the findings from the focus group discussion.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary of Main Findings

Many of the findings are extremely interrelated meaning that they oftentimes are experienced simultaneously and may be consequences of each other. Therefore, presenting the results in a coherent, logical manner was somewhat demanding. Thus, when reading the Findings and Analysis section, one must keep in mind the complicated nature of the results as they are all in one way or another linked to each other. That being said, below are the main findings by category.

6.1.1 Main Findings Pertaining to Language Issues

The main findings regarding language issues on campus pertain, firstly, to whether English is used well in the participants' opinion, secondly, to what are the main forums where English may not be used, and, thirdly, what are the feelings that the international students experience when English is not used.

All in all, the participants do not feel that English is used enough on campus. The international participants see that the problem lies largely in the behavior of the Finnish students, while they do, however, tell personal experiences of how they themselves might be the ones not promoting the use of English.

The situations where neglecting the use of English usually happens according to the participants are the following: Firstly, breaks from lectures, where people gather around sofas and small talk – in Finnish. Secondly, from time to time, social media chat groups. Thirdly, social events organized by the student union were discussed in great detail. Many participants felt that the fear of feeling excluded due to language issues affects their willingness to participate those events.

The main sets of feelings that the participants reported experiencing when they find themselves in a situation where English is not used are

- Feelings pertaining to confusion
- Feelings of exclusion
- Annoyance
- Frustration for not being able to contribute to the conversation

All aforementioned sets of feelings were reported by both focus groups. However, based on the discussions, feelings of confusion seemed to be the dominating set of feelings among Vietnamese participants, and feelings of frustration for not being given the chance to join the conversation seemed to be dominant among other international students.

It was interesting to notice a rather high level of empathy between the international students and Finnish students towards the other groups' perspectives.

6.1.2 Main Findings Pertaining to Group Cohesion

In conclusion, there seems to be somewhat of a division and clearly lack of group cohesion among Finnish and international students on campus. As a rule of thumb, Finnish students mainly spend time with other Finnish students, international students mainly spend time with other international students, and, more specifically Vietnamese students spend time either with other Vietnamese students or international students.

The most significant finding is that the participants representing international students are affected in a negative way by the lack of feelings of group cohesion with the Finnish students. This lack of group cohesion seems to mainly arise from language issues – more precisely, the lacking usage of English in social settings on campus. Simultaneously, Finnish students do not seem to be affected by the lack of group cohesion between them and international students.

6.1.3 Main Findings Pertaining to Study Motivation

This research was hoped to shed light on the complicated issue of study motivation, specifically the study motivation of international students. The study was conducted in a way that might help reveal impacts that the lacking use of English and lack of group cohesion might have on international students' study motivation.

There does not seem to be any significant linkage between study motivation and language issues together with feelings of group cohesion.

However, in the light of Maslow's (1943) theory on human motivation, as well as some other studies on group cohesion and motivation (e.g. Gu et al., 2011; Rock, 2011) it could be argued that the significantly low feelings of group cohesion might very well affect the international students' levels of study motivation, without them necessarily even realizing it themselves. Some did say it does play a role on some instances and the Vietnamese focus group, in fact, discussed it in more detail, but all in all no strong linkage was found.

6.2 Answers to Research Questions

The study aimed so answer the following research questions:

1. How does successful language use in social settings affect student study motivation and perceptions of being part of a cohesive group? In this context, international students are defined as non-Finnish speaking students.
2. Do international students relate more to other international students than to the university community as a whole? If so, what are the main reasons?
3. Are perceptions of group cohesion affected by a 'support group' sharing the same mother tongue?

Answers to research questions:

1. There seems to be only a very mild impact on the study motivation based on the answers provided by the participants.
2. Nearly all international students, with some exceptions, stated identifying themselves more with a smaller part of the student body, not the whole of it.
3. Yes. Finnish students have a vast support group and they do, in fact, feel very differently about the issue. Regarding the Vietnamese students' focus group, no significant impact is visible.

6.3 Conclusions and Discussion

The most explicit and significant conclusion of this study is that in Aalto, Mikkeli unit, English, the mutual language of everyone on campus, is not used enough among the students in social settings. This is the perception of all the participants, international and Finnish alike. The lacking use of English parallel with the extensive use of Finnish seems to pose many challenges to the integration of the high number of international students.

The vast majority of the international students seem to be quite strongly affected by the non-use of English in most social situations. They tend to lack feelings of group cohesion mainly caused by constantly feeling excluded due to the excessive use of Finnish. On a concrete level, the lack of group cohesion can be seen as missing friendships between Finnish and international students.

As a focus group member pointed out: “This [Aalto, Mikkeli] is not an international program. It’s a Finnish program with some international students.” Considering that one of the main aspects Aalto Mikkeli promotes is its genuine internationality, it is quite shocking to find a clear division between international and Finnish students, and even more so, acknowledge that the international students’ perceptions contradict the message of internationality quite strongly.

Based on the data collected in this study, it could even be argued that the Finnish students ‘rule the campus’, while the international students stay in the shadow. This in spite of the fact that really, the high level of international students is perhaps the greatest asset of this university program. The existence of ‘a Finnish empire’ would seem to be something not belonging to Aalto ideology. Having said this, it must, however, be noted that this does not imply that the Finnish students would be ‘bad’ in any way or even consciously decide to exclude international students. Instead, there are very intuitive reasons behind their behavior.

Firstly, the unit is located in Finland and Finns make up the majority of the student body making it only natural that the Finnish language might, at times, override English usage. As Finnish students are not personally affected by the non-use of

English, it is difficult for them to see it as a problem.

Secondly, the power of one's mother tongue should not be underestimated. The Finnish students of the unit without exception have excellent English language skills. Despite that, they prefer using their native language Finnish and many find it far more comfortable than English. Because the unit is based in Finland and the majority of the students are Finnish, the existence of this support group enables them to stay in their comfort zone – Finnish. Naturally, they would not behave the same way if they would not have that support group, neither would it be possible to stick to their comfort zone as strongly.

Furthermore, while international students are affected by the division among them and Finnish students, Finnish students do acknowledge the existence of such a division, but they are not affected by it in any major way. This is most likely caused by the support group and comfort zone brought by belonging to the majority on campus.

This being said, the Vietnamese students, who form a significant minority, do show the same tendencies to stick to their comfort zone: the Vietnamese community of Aalto, Mikkeli. Yet, as they are a minority, they do experience the lacking usage of English equally strongly as other international students without such support group.

Lastly, the impact of culture should be considered. Language and culture, and therefore also behavior regarding language use are hugely interrelated. For example, communication is not only words and transmitting information. It has numerous other functions, such as expressing emotion. However, communication in the cultural context of Finland tends to be very information-based and the use of the language is often quite economical, leaving some of the functions of communication unaddressed. Other cultures – some of which are represented in Aalto, Mikkeli – may use language in a very different manner, perhaps with more talk, less fact oriented, and focusing on the social connections created by communication.

Thereby, it is likely that a lot of the mishap is caused by cultural differences: no one means any harm, but the differing expectations between Finnish and international students regarding communication leads to feelings of disappointment and other

negative emotions as discussed in this study. This is not to underestimate the problems created by insufficient use of English among the students, but after conducting the study it seems that the aspect of culture should have been included in the research questions, as it emerged so clearly as an important theme in the data.

Moreover, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010) found that the use of English as lingua franca, the mutual language in a multilingual organization, is often highly contextual, meaning that it is easily used only in work-related situations. Thus, combining the Finnish cultural context with the easy contextual use of English as a mutual language, the findings in the case of Aalto Mikkeli can certainly be seen as understandable, even logical.

MacKenzie and Baldassar (2016) also pointed out missing friendships between international and local college students. They concluded that the missing friendships were largely a result of local students expecting friendship with internationals to not be possible because they might not have as many things in common, or they did not see friendships with international students necessary as they had their large group of locals. The finding is coherent with what is found in this study. It seems that the human desire for interpersonal similarity, as discussed by Mäkelä et al. (2006), is a strong driver in our behavior resulting in Finnish students sticking to other Finnish students and international students sticking to other international students. It should be noted, however, that for the international students, the main factor bringing them together is merely that they are not Finnish. Therefore, there is not a similar support group at work as there is for Finnish students.

Based on the research, there does not seem to be a significant connection between feelings of group cohesion and study motivation among the students. However, most international participants noted that they are mostly just waiting to wrap up their studies in Mikkeli and move on, while also expressing strongly lacking feelings of group cohesion. Studies have found that group cohesion indeed fosters motivation, and particularly intrinsic motivation (e.g. Gu et al., 2011; Rock, 2011). Furthermore, based on Maslow's (1943) theory on human motivation, the human need for belonging, among other needs, impacts motivation. It is fair to say that for many international students in the target organization, this need for belonging is not

fulfilled.

In conclusion, language matters – precisely the lacking use of the mutual language, English – are a cause for many issues among the student body of the target organization. The issues mainly pertain to the division between Finnish and international students, which in turn affects the well-being of international students.

The knowledge this study provides on the students' thoughts and experiences could well play a crucial role in improving the study program as a whole. Therefore, it would be important to address these issues in order to enhance student well-being and future success of Aalto Mikkeli.

This could be done, for instance, by increasing awareness of cultural differences and how profoundly it may affect our behavior. Knowledge on how the counterpart behaves, and why, frequently helps diminish negative feelings and also initiates a platform to alter one's behavior. Furthermore, as this study sheds light on the perspective of the international students, increasing knowledge of how they feel about the situation may help improve matters.

The students of Aalto, Mikkeli are bright individuals, who also showed great empathy and understanding towards their counterparts in this research. That, as a starting point, together with all that is described above, would most likely start to mend the high contextuality of English usage as a mutual language and gradually help the organization move from mostly work-related use to a wider, more socially aware use of the language.

6.4 Implications for International Business

It should be noted that an educational setting naturally differs from a business setting in many ways. Nonetheless, in light of previous research conducted in the field and the coherence between the findings in this study with those of other scholars from the

business setting, some of the principles found in this study may apply to business settings.

On the whole, language matters similar to the ones discussed in this study do have a significance for a multinational and, thus, multilingual corporation. Gaining in-depth understanding on how a variety of languages in a corporation may impact motivation, performance, as well as the well-being of the members of the corporation, may very well unlock hidden potential and improve the corporation's performance as a whole.

6.5 Limitations

It is fair to believe that there are two main limitations for this study, along with other smaller, perhaps less significant limitations. The two most significant ones would be the fact that the effect of personality and the effect of one's cultural background on one's experience and perception on the issues discussed were not taken into account.

Cultural background might very well have a significant impact on how one feels in, behaves in, and views different situations. For someone from a very different cultural background than Finland, something that a Finn might consider 'normal' or 'harmless', might be hurtful to someone from another culture.

In this study, no focus was set on personality traits. However, for the type of issues discussed in this study, personality traits might very well play a significant role in how one perceives and feels about the issues discussed. Furthermore, already from this research, with no deliberate focus on personality traits, some themes surfaced regarding the possible effect of personality on their answers.

Other limitations include language barriers impacting perhaps both the interpretation of the data as well as how one experiences and perceives the issues discussed. This limitation refers to the risk there always is in intercultural communication in a non-

native language. For example, some nuances might be missed, or culture differences may impact the interpretation of one another.

In addition, language proficiency of the participants could have been measured and examined more thoroughly as it seemed to emerge as an important factor in the research.

Finally, limitations regarding the choice of using a focus group as the primary research method should be considered. Focus groups are excellent for creating a safe, relaxed environment for less structured discussion, where ideas and thoughts flow. It allows natural interaction between the interviewer and the focus group members as well as among all the focus group members. The interviewer is able to easily ask follow-up questions and pick up non-verbal information from the members. However, there are some downsides to the use of this method.

The focus group members may feel peer pressure to give similar answers as the other members and might not express themselves as freely if they disagree with the opinions that are being voiced as they would in a one-on-one interview. As the interviewer in the focus group, it is important to constantly be aware of the dynamics in the group and look out for non-verbal signals of someone perhaps wanting to express disagreement but is not speaking up for one reason or another. In conducting this research, there was a vivid example of the previously described in the Finnish focus group. Everyone was exclaiming how they certainly identify themselves with the entire student body over a smaller part of it. It seemed that one of the members might not feel the same way, s/he looked slightly uncomfortable and wasn't joining the conversation. After asking what his/her thoughts are on the subject s/he told openly how s/he feels completely the opposite. Thus, remaining observant of the focus group members was crucial in order to not leave a piece of information missing.

6.5.1 Generalizability

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, its generalizability is naturally quite limited. The generalizability of the research suffers also from the use of focus groups instead of, for instance, interviewing all the international students. However, interviewing all the international students would have been too time consuming compared to the advantage it would provide over the combination of focus groups and individual interviews. On this occasion, since special attention was paid to how the focus groups were formed, they together with the interviews formed quite a comprehensive representation of the international student body at Aalto, Mikkeli Campus.

6.6 Suggestions for Further Research

Language issues in multicultural organizations is a rather comprehensively researched topic. Nonetheless, in the light of this research, the following areas are suggested to be taken a closer look on in future research.

1. The effect of cultural background on one's perception of the issues discussed in this study. Moreover, the use of a 'third culture', in this case the 'Mikkeli spirit' as briefly discussed in this study, could prove as an interesting area of further research.
2. The effect of personality on one's perception of the issues discussed in this study
3. Empathy and understanding towards the other party were present in all the discussions and interviews conducted for this study. This includes Finnish students understanding that the fact that they choose to neglect the use of English is hurting the other person. Yet, they do not change their behavior, e.g. for reasons related to social pressure. It may be interesting to find the underlying reasons behind such behavior.

4. Based on this study, it seems like it is not only language barriers causing lack of group cohesion, and frankly, missing friendships between international and Finnish students. This has already been researched briefly in the educational context, international business world.

This study gave insights on the situation of one target organization – a multicultural university program. Increasing knowledge and understanding on language matters and their impact on, for instance, social structures or performance in multicultural organizations is an important field of study for enhancing the future success of the ever-increasing number of multicultural organizations in International Business.

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